

Implementing ISO 9001:2000
Do You Hire a Consultant, or Do-It Yourself?
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This paper provides a view on selecting and utilizing consultants in the context of ISO 9001:2000 Business Management System (BMS) development/implementation. Having worked as an ISO 9001:2000 program manager, coach, mentor, trainer and auditor since 1998 I strongly recommend you to ask the following fundamental questions before starting your ISO 9001:2000 journey:

- What is the aim of your ISO 9001:2000 implementation or the business driver?
 - Customer/Market driven or internally self-imposed
- Do you need to use a consultant, or would it be best to use your in-house resources?
 - Evaluate the opportunity cost of long term commitment vs. short term project
- How can we find a good consultant and how can we distinguish a competent consultant from one who is not?
 - Has the consultant worked in various areas of the particular industry or business operations?
- How should the contract with the consultant be drawn up to avoid disappointment and unwelcome surprises once the work gets going?
 - Do you use a fixed price description and rate?
- What is the business management system realization processes and what are the tasks of the consultant and those of the organization's employees?
 - This will impact the difference in owning the development and BMS versus the dependence of a consultant maintaining the BMS.

The first question about the overall reason for your ISO 9001:2000 implementation is a critical one to start off with. My experience tells me that if your motives are not starting you off on the right track, then your system might end up as a bureaucratic pain rather than a business gain!

Main drivers

Obviously, the hope of business/quality experts is that many organizations go for ISO 9001:2000 implementation because they want to improve the overall business performance focusing on their organizations activities, products and services. However, in the real world the main drivers tend to be business drivers, such as supply chain pressure, access to foreign markets, or marketing and export opportunities.

Nevertheless, ultimately, success in this context is all about using ISO 9001:2000 as a management tool or system to help you manage all critical business risks and opportunities in the spirit of continual improvement. It should not really be a surprise

that a management system can only be an efficient and effective investment if you use it as a management tool to help you make decisions and decide on strategy and investments!

Unfortunately, in the real world I have observed too many organizations that are not using ISO 9001:2000 this way, but rather as a means to get a certificate on the wall that confirm that they are certified (this is the tail wagging the dog). Such organizations usually want to do it quick and cheap, but this often turns out to be the very route to a costly and fragmented system as it is reduced to maintaining a “documented” bureaucracy designed to deliver a certificate, along with an illusion of assurance, rather than a system to help you manage the issues that really matter.

My strong recommendation is to:

1. Understand your business niche. Realistically understand who you are as well as who you are not.
2. Take the time to work out how to use ISO 9001:2000 as a management tool and how to integrate it with the way you manage your key business processes (manage ISO, don't let ISO manage you).
3. Document and link a clearly defined Vision, Mission, Policy and objectives for running your business. This becomes the foundation for all the work you will commit to do and what you will not commit to do as a business decision not as a result of omission.
4. Get Employee buy-in (top to bottom). Employees are sensitive to “flavors of the month” quality initiatives and programs so engage employees and identify how you can deliver business improvements that are of relevance to your key customers and stakeholders! That way you and your customers who are critical to your business success will benefit from it!
5. Be prepared to endure the long haul. There will be times when other priorities seem more important to invest organizational resources (money and people). Management commitment will be judged critically by this.

Using ISO 9001:2000 correctly, will impact the organizational culture. The improper implementation of any business/improvement initiative (whether its ISO 9000:2000, Baldrige, or Lean Six sigma) will eventually lead to failure and a loss of credibility and money. Therefore, it is important that top management understand and embrace the spirit of the ISO 9001:2000 principles as the business infrastructure in which they operate. Within this structure there is provision for improvement of that infrastructure. It is key to understand the strengths and weakness of a business system versus improvement initiatives and properly synergize these efforts in the most cost effective manner. If you do not embrace the spirit of the principles you will end up with a costly bureaucratic mess. The return on investment from your BMS largely depends on how strategic you implement and make use of the BMS. Without proper strategic and measured investment your chances of positive returns might be limited.

Now that I have given you my perspective for the motives behind ISO 9001:2000 implementation, I can now move on to considerations about whether and how to get consultants involved.

Scale of the task

You need to get a good understanding of the scale of the task ahead of you, your strategy for implementation and the availability of in-house resources before being able to determine whether you need external support.

Do you want to integrate your BMS with your existing quality system? In many cases portions of an ISO 9001:2000 BMS system is already in place, however it is not a prerequisite for successful ISO 9001:2000 implementation. Or do you want to focus directly on your core business processes and implement a wider business management system that takes care of your environmental, security, social, quality and other key business priorities?

At this stage, some external input might indicate a fruitful avenue, but remember that customers, business partners or regional support networks can often also be a source of help and inspiration. Alternatively a consultant, project manager or facilitator from outside of your organization might be able to provide value for money by supporting or facilitating your process of figuring out what direction you want to take and how big the job is! But remember, when push comes to shove, your system and its success belongs to you.

Success is all about using ISO 9001:2000 as a management tool

Let's stop here for a moment and dispel the common perception that every ISO 9001:2000 implementation is more or less the same job. No, it is not! To make ISO 9001:2000 work in an organization, it is all about making it relevant and real to that organization.

Therefore, watch out for the consultant who wants to sell you his "one size fits all" manual! Too often, that has led to systems that are not sufficiently relevant or appropriate to the organization in which they have been implemented. Creating generic procedures that are lengthy and not related to your business processes will only lead to frustration and extra cost of maintenance.

However, common templates can be useful as a means to provide some direction. In many large international organizations, they have also been used to establish a common framework with aligned processes. If a consultant is able to help you link your activities, products and services this is the scope of what ISO 9001:2000 wants you to consider with the main business risks and opportunities, then your system will take shape as a tool that is able to support management in making the right decisions at the right time.

Business opportunities

A very practical way of identifying whether you want to use external input would be to set up an ISO 9001:2000 strategy day where you should have senior management, the

persons(s) responsible for systems, environment, security, human resources, procurement, training, safety, all present to decide on your ISO 9001:2000 strategy. You could invite three consultants to give you a 20-minute presentation each, focusing on an introduction to ISO 9001:2000, success factors for ISO 9001:2000 implementation and how they could help you. Remember, they work for you and should not influence any requests or requirements that are not a natural part of your business.

Remain in charge of the implementation project it must result in **your** system!

After the presentations, you should do a brainstorming session about your strategy for implementation and then determine which roles should be fulfilled by internal and external staff. If you are convinced that external input is needed, then provide the consultants with some terms of reference and ask them to come back with a proposal.

In addition to the question of whether and what kind of consultant you might want to choose, the issue of selecting an appropriate certification body is a critical challenge. It is also my experience that the interpretation of ISO 9001:2000 varies substantially between different auditors.

Therefore, beside price, reputation and verifying that the certification body is accredited for your business sector, you should ask the third party firm for the names and resumes of the lead auditors that they may use, that he or she has a relevant certification and the opportunity to speak and interview the lead auditors so you may select them. Getting an idea of the company and his or her approach to ISO 9001:2000 and the related interpretation will help you with figuring out whether you are on the same wave length! Avoid auditors that are only interested in documentation as evidence that a system is in place.

How to secure funding

If you are in charge of your company's ISO 9001:2000 implementation project, you will need to secure funding for the consultant's fees and other investments. Here is a suggested rule-of-thumb method for calculating the amount required and justifying it.

How much money could we save if we were to improve the business by 10% in relation to product/service output through our ISO 9001:2000 implementation?

After you have made an estimate of what you might be able to save in most cases 10% is quite a realistic objective then propose to your senior management that you get at least 20% of that figure for you to control as part of your ISO 9001:2000 investment project.

What to ask a consultant before you make a hiring decision

Before making a decision to engage a consultant, you should ask for the following information:

- Evidence that he or she has provided ISO 9001:2000 consultancy to other companies in the relevant sector and region

- Consideration should be given to those consultants who have worked as ANAB accredited ISO 9001:2000 lead auditors
- Name of consultant(s) who will work on the job
- Scope of proposed input (you might yourself define the scope for which you want input)
- Generic and tailored training available (unless already available internally)
- Fees for services, clarification of which services have a fixed price and which depend on workload it is difficult at the outset of a project to predict how much input is needed for certain activities and you might even realize as your staff become more confident that you want to do more work internally
- Training materials and documentation that will be available for your in-house use
- Whether remote support by telephone and e-mail included in the quote and
- Examples of systems the consultant has developed for other companies study the documentation and ask if you can also have a site visit to gain an appreciation of his or her work.
- An agreement on the interpretation of the standard between you and the consultant and/or registrar organization.

Pieces of advice

Finally, I would like to finish off with the following pieces of advice:

- Remain in control of your ISO 9001:2000 system and in charge of the implementation project it must result in your system! And remember that it is you and your staff who will be running it once the consultant's input is finished.
- If you are offered a consulting and certification package, do not buy it as it is not in line with the requirement for independence with regard to consulting and third party certification!
- Do not measure the success of the implementation and the consultant's input by the size of the documentation that has been developed, but rather by the involvement and commitment of the organization and the related competency that has been developed during the project.
- Ensure that all of the specific outputs of the project are owned by your organization.
- Refer to and use ISO 10019 Guidelines for the selection of Quality Management System consultants and use of their services
- Hire or develop an internal ISO 9000:2000 subject matter expert within your organization to manage standard interpretation, with the consultant or registrar, and provide explanation of standard requirements within your organization. This is someone who understands your business niche but also someone who can leverage industry experience with implementation and maintenance of the system.